Abstracts


We assessed the impact of an individual difference variable, relationship-focused thinking, on women’s acute salivary cortisol responses during and after a guided imagery task. Specifically, 29 healthy women, all of whom were experiencing high levels of passionate love, but varied on levels of relationship-focused thinking, were assigned to one of two experimental conditions: a partner reflection condition or a cross-sex friend reflection condition. Results indicated that women experiencing passionate love evidenced increased cortisol levels when asked to reflect on their romantic partner and relationship relative to women asked to reflect on a cross-sex friendship, but this difference was particularly pronounced and relatively long-lasting for those women characterized by a high amount of relationship-focused thinking. Our study significantly expands extant work on the passionate love—cortisol link by isolating the impact of a specific psychological variable, relationship-focused thinking, on the physiological experience of falling in love. We believe our work highlights the advances that can be made when established work in the close relationships and neuroendocrine fields are integrated.


Nonmarital couples’ salivary cortisol responses during a likelihood of marriage discussion were assessed. Sixty-eight couple members (34 couples) in the United States independently indicated the extent to which they had experience thinking about and talking about marriage to their current partners (i.e., marriage novelty). Couples subsequently jointly graphed their chance of marriage to each other over the course of their relationship histories. Increased levels of marriage novelty predicted heightened cortisol reactivity to the joint discussion relative to cortisol responses of couple members for whom the idea of marriage was less novel. These results highlight the impact simply discussing transitions can have on individuals’ physiological responses, and add to the expanding literature concerning the link between nonmarital romances and biological outcomes.


Objective: To examine the effects of social support role (i.e., recipient versus provider) and experimentally manipulated closeness on men’s and women’s cortisol responses during an acute stress paradigm. Methods: We manipulated psychological closeness (high versus low) between 50 same-sex stranger pairs and subsequently randomly assigned individuals to either prepare a speech (i.e., support recipient) or provide support to the speech presenter (i.e., support provider). Results: When receiving support, cortisol responses of men in the high closeness condition increased over time relative to a) men in the low closeness condition and b) women in the high closeness condition. Cortisol responses of female support recipients did not differ as a function
of condition. For support providers, whereas both men’s and women’s cortisol declined throughout the procedure, the decline for men was steeper than the decline for women. Conclusions: With few exceptions, psychological closeness, sex, and social support role interacted in theoretically consistent ways and each significantly contributed to the pattern of cortisol responses observed in men and women during a standardized acute stress paradigm. This work expands the growing literature on potential mechanisms underlying the social support-health link. Further, the employed methodology highlights the utility of borrowing established paradigms from the close relationships literature to help illuminate specific interpersonal characteristics that might affect social support dynamics in naturally existing relationships and at the same time control for extraneous variables. Key words: closeness, social support, support provider, support recipient, anticipatory stressor, cortisol.


In this study, a prototype analysis of romantic missing was conducted. College-age participants in the United States generated features of missing a partner (Study 1) and rated their centrality (Study 2). In a reaction time task, participants made category judgments for central features more quickly than for noncentral features (Study 3). In recognition and recall tasks, central features were more salient in participants’ memory, and participants evaluated individuals experiencing central features in vignettes as missing their partners more (Study 4). A prototype based measure of missing administered to individuals in long-distance relationships (Study 5) correlated with commitment and attachment dimensions but only weakly with loneliness. Finally, level of missing differed based on whether individuals were in a geographically distant (vs. proximal) relationships (Study 6).